

## ***THE WASHINGTON GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT***

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act to define and implement growth strategies. The Act required a new level of planned and coordinated growth for the counties where the population growth rate had exceeded 10 percent between 1980 and 1990.

Growth Management requires counties and cities to cooperatively write county-wide plans. Under Growth Management, state agencies must comply with comprehensive plans developed by the counties. As part of the Act, all counties and cities must identify resource lands (agricultural, forest or mineral resource lands) of long-term commercial significance. Regulations must be adopted to assure that land use adjacent to these resource lands shall not interfere with their continued use in the accustomed manner and in accordance with best management practices.

The Growth Management Act requires development of criteria to identify natural resources of statewide significance. Natural resources of statewide significance are those that possess outstanding natural, ecological or scenic values. They are the highest quality and most significant of their type and are of interest to all residents of the state. Growth Management requires development of minimum standards to protect natural resources of statewide significance. Conservation easements are one method specified in the Act to protect natural resources of statewide significance.

Counties planning under the Growth Management Act must designate urban growth areas, where extended services will encourage and accommodate urban growth. Only non-urban growth may occur outside urban growth areas. Counties or cities may not designate land within urban growth areas as forest or agricultural resource lands unless the city or county has authorized the transfer or purchase of development rights. In urban growth areas, the Growth Management Act also requires cities and counties to identify open space lands for public use or access to prevent development. Cities and counties may use a variety of methods -- including transfer of development rights and easements -- to acquire interest in open space lands.

Lands between urban growth areas and resource lands are commonly referred to as rural "transition lands." In rural transition lands, non-urban development is permitted as well as agricultural and forestry uses or mineral extraction. Minimum parcel sizes and densities permitted on rural transition lands will not allow urban development but also are not large enough to discourage uses other than agricultural, forestry or mineral extraction. Due to comprehensive plan requirements and minimum parcel sizes on resource lands, rural transition lands are most threatened by the conversion from forestry to low intensity rural development.

Forest Legacy and the Washington Growth Management Act share many common objectives, such as identifying forest land areas threatened by conversion or containing important public values. Both emphasize using development rights' purchase and conservation easements as important methods for protecting these valuable lands. Forest Legacy and the Growth Management Act both require broad public participation and cooperative working relations among agencies.